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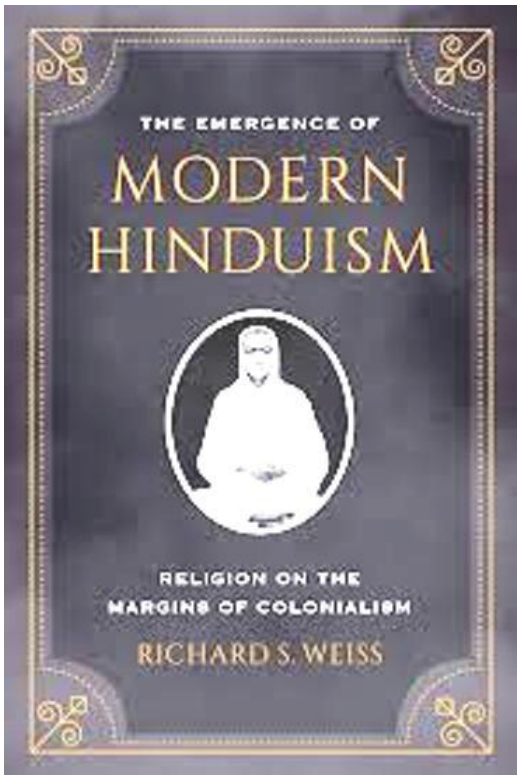

The Emergence of Modern Hinduism (Religion on the Margins of Colonialism)

By Richard S. Weiss

The Emergence of Modern Hinduism argues for the importance of regional, vernacular innovation in processes of Hindu modernization. Scholars usually trace the emergence of modern Hinduism to cosmopolitan reform movements, producing accounts that overemphasize the centrality of elite religion and the influence of Western ideas and models. In this study, the author considers religious change on the margins of colonialism by looking at an important local figure, the Tamil Shaiva poet and mystic Ramalinga Swami (1823-1874).

RICHARD S. WEISS is Associate Professor of South Asian Religions at the Victoria University of Wellington. He is the author of Recipes for Immortality: Medicine, Religion, and Community in South India.

Not for Sale

Published by: International Thirukkural Virtual Institute

Richard S. Weiss narrates a history of Hindu modernization that demonstrates the transformative role of Hindu ideas, models, and institutions, making this text essential for scholarly audiences of South Asian history, religious studies, Hindu studies, and South Asian studies.

We give just a gist of the contents chapter wise.

1. Introduction: Rethinking Religious Change in Nineteenth-Century South Asia

The introduction presents a new model to account for the emergence of modern Hinduism. Prevailing scholarship on nineteenth-century Hinduism has focused on cosmopolitan Hindu reform leaders who formulated new Hindu expressions in dialogue with Western ideas and models. These studies insist that Western influence provided the impetus for Hindu modernization, leaving little space for Hindu traditions to play a creative role in religious change. This chapter advances a model of modernization that highlights the transformative, modernizing capacities of tradition. It presents new ways of doing scholarly work that more accurately reflect diverse ways of being modern, as well as the agency of a greater range of actors, not just for the case of Hindus, but for colonized people throughout the world.

2. Giving to the Poor: Ramalinga's Transformation of Hindu Charity

Chapter 2 analyzes Ramalinga's ideology of the ritual giving of food to the hungry poor. His novel ideology of giving marked a radical departure from established South Indian Shaiva ritual processes, which excluded poor, lower-caste participants. A recent study traces his project of food charity to Christian influence. This chapter takes a different position, demonstrating that Ramalinga drew primarily from prior Shaiva traditions, especially tantra and siddha, and also from institutions that emerged out of complex interactions between Western and Indian sources. More broadly, the chapter demonstrates the importance of traditional Shaiva precedents and ideas in shaping this modern practice.

3. The Publication of Tiruvaruṭpā: The Authority of Canon and Print

Chapter 3 looks at the impact of print technology on Hinduism in the middle of the nineteenth century, the period when print began to proliferate in South Asia. Hindu reformers, often directly influenced by Christian publishing in India, employed print in order to extend the audiences and influence of established canons through accessible publications in prose. Ramalinga and his followers used print differently, challenging established Shaiva authority and scripture by publishing a compilation of his poems as a new contribution to canon. Ramalinga used print to claim that his verses were the equal of revered devotional literature and that he was worthy of a place in the pantheon of Shaiva saints.

4. Ramalinga's Devotional Poems: Creating a Hagiography

The fourth chapter examines Ramalinga's views of authority and tradition through a close reading of his devotional works. Scholars have noted that Hindu reformers emphasized the authority of the written text and also that they relegated scripture and revelation to the distant past, expressing nostalgia for a golden age of Hindu tradition. Ramalinga diverged strongly from these views, asserting that Shaivism was a living, oral tradition based on direct experiences of Shiva's revelation that continue into the present. The chapter stresses the auto-hagiographical character of Ramalinga's writings to argue that new notions of the literary past were emerging in nineteenth-century South Asia outside of reform Hinduism.

5. The Polemics of Conflicting Modernities

Chapter 5 presents a detailed scholarly account of an important debate between Ramalinga and the Tamil Shaiva reform leader Arumuga Navalar. Like Ramalinga, Navalar worked to transform Tamil Shaivism, but his vision of tradition closely conformed to cosmopolitan expressions of Hinduism. He sought to limit the Shaiva canon to a specific corpus of revered texts, and he advanced a rationality that denied the possibility of modern miracles and new scriptural revelations. He strongly criticized Ramalinga's supernatural claims and the use of Ramalinga's verses in Shaiva ritual contexts. His resistance to Ramalinga's influence underscores the disparity between Ramalinga's vision of Hinduism and those of cosmopolitan leaders. This chapter thus highlights the diversity of Hindu approaches to modernization.

6. The Modernity of Yoga Powers in Colonial India

.Chapter 6 considers Ramalinga's claim to have acquired extraordinary powers. Most studies of Hindu modernization describe processes of rationalization, with Hindu reformers distancing themselves from miraculous claims. Ramalinga, on the other hand, claimed to possess supernatural powers, and he promised his followers that they too could acquire these powers by joining his community. He embraced tantric and siddha expressions of Shaivism to challenge reform models of an increasingly rational Hinduism. The chapter argues that his promotion of the miraculous has endured, leading to the conclusion that his vision of an enchanted Hinduism is as modern as that of a rational, reform Hinduism.

Conclusion

The conclusion challenges the scholarly tendency to locate the origins of modern Hinduism only in cosmopolitan reform Hinduism and, by extension, in dialogue with the West. It demonstrates that Ramalinga's innovations aligned with, and contributed to, new trends in Hindu expression, including the extension of ritual to lower castes; the use of new technologies to increase accessibility and to challenge established authority; and the sustained "enchantment" of Hinduism and its emphasis on charismatic leadership. The chapter argues that because Ramalinga drew inspiration from Shaiva traditions in articulating these innovations, any consideration of Hindu modernity must take seriously the role of Hindu traditions not just in forging continuity with the past but also with providing sources of innovation and change. The work concludes with a call for further studies that examine regional leaders working in vernacular languages, and for frameworks that consider multiple modernities with diverse genealogies.

SASCHA EBELING, author of *Colonizing the Realm of Words:The Transformation of Tamil Literature in Nineteenth-Century South India* appreciates this inspiring work as "Offering a brilliant, detailed analysis of an extraordinary Tamil religious figure and intellectual, this book is a landmark intervention that is without a doubt one of the most important studies of Hinduism to be published in recent years."

Questtions and Answers in Thirukkural

------Thirukkuralaar Dr.R.Prabhakaran

60.3 Energy

(60.3 ஊக்கமுடைமை)

Question:

Is it sufficient to have a big dream to achieve great success?

Answer:

Think lofty thoughts always; even if they fail to materialize, it is still as good as having materialized. (Couplet-596)

உள்ளுவது எல்லாம் உயர்வுள்ளல் மற்றது

தள்ளினுந் தள்ளாமை நீர்த்து. (குற 59.

Explanation:

Dreams alone cannot guarantee success. The probability of success increases if the dreams are accompanied by appropriate goals, hard work, dedication, and persistence. Even then, it is entirely possible that one may not achieve the desired degree of success. The famous boxer Mike Tyson is quoted as saying, “If I shoot for the moon, even if I don’t get the moon, I might get some clouds.” That is very true. If the big dream is accompanied by dedication, specific goals, hard work, and persistence, one may achieve at least partial positive results, if not complete success.

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One of my brothers had a dream of becoming a General in the Indian army. That was his dream right from a very early age. During his school days, he studied the life history of Napoleon Bonaparte with great interest and admired Napoleon's military genius. When he was about eighteen years old, he wanted to join the army. He could only join as a soldier. But his dream of becoming a high-ranking officer was always alive. He appeared for competitive examinations held for the selection of officers. Although he scored very high on the written tests, he failed in the interview. This was primarily due to the bias in the Indian army that once someone was a soldier, he was considered virtually unfit to become an officer. But, in his next attempt, he was successful and became an officer. By virtue of his superior performance, he was promoted to the ranks of Lieutenant, Captain, Major, Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, and Brigadier General. He was shortlisted for the position of Major General. But in India, positions like Major General and above are political appointments. He did not have the political connection required, so he had to retire as a Brigadier General. Even though his dream did not materialize as anticipated, he accomplished most of what he hoped to achieve and had a great career in the Indian army.

The story of my brother is not unique. There are numerous examples of athletes, military generals, politicians, and corporate leaders achieving most of their dreams, if not in their entirety. The process of dreaming and working towards achieving the dream produces a wealth of benefits for the dreamer. Valluvar has thought about this aspect of the dream, which is why he says that even if the dream does not come true, it is still good to dream and work towards it.

So, lofty ideals and big dreams are indeed the basis of success. Therefore, one should certainly dream, and persistent hard work towards achieving that dream will invariably make a dream come true.

61.1 Sloth

(61.1 மடியின்மை)

Question:
How does sloth affect the family honor of a person?
Answer:
The light of family honor will be extinguished due
to the dirt of a slothful attitude. (Couplet – 601)

குடியென்னும் குன்றா விளக்கம் மடியென்னும்
மாசூர மாய்ந்து கெடும். (குறள் – 601)

Explanation:

It is generally accepted that a person of good family background might inherit some of the character traits of his parents. In particular, it can be expected that he would be prone to working hard and not being lazy. Despite being the offspring of hard-working parents, if the person is prone to a slothful attitude, over time, the good characteristics he had inherited from his parents will vanish, and he will be looked down on by those who know his family background. In Couplet 601, Valluvar compares the family honor to light and a slothful attitude to dirt. As dirt accumulates, the light gets extinguished. Likewise, when a slothful attitude takes over, the glory of family honor will disappear.

61.2 Sloth
61.2 மடியின்மை)

Question:
What are some of the qualities that will ruin a person?
Answer:
Procrastination, forgetfulness, sloth, and excessive sleep
are the vehicles of those prone to ruin. (Couplet – 605)

நெடுநீர் மறவி மடிதுயில் நான்கும்
கெடுநீரார் காமக் கலன். (குறள் – 605)

Explanation:

According to Valluvar, procrastination, forgetfulness, sloth, and excessive sleep are the four qualities that will affect a person adversely in many ways. These four qualities may sometimes destroy one's reputation, ruin his career, and be detrimental to his success in life. Procrastination is the action of unnecessarily and voluntarily delaying or postponing something despite knowing that there will be negative consequences for doing so. As the proverb says, "Procrastination is the thief of time." The consequences may be severe depending on what is not done on time. If a student procrastinates and does not study well, he will fail his test. If an employee fails to submit a report on time, he may be fired. If a patient procrastinates having a medical procedure, it may be fatal. So, procrastination is always detrimental to one's progress, success, or well-being. Forgetfulness is equally bad or perhaps even worse than procrastination. At least the one who procrastinates may end up doing what must be done relatively late instead of promptly. The one who forgets to do things may be unable to recover from his lapses.

Sloth is slowness in the mindset and disinclination to act. Sloth is similar to laziness. Sloth is always wanting to rest and relax, with no desire or intention of doing useful and necessary activities. According to the Bible, sloth is considered one of the seven cardinal sins. Apart from sin, failure or unwillingness to work will lead to poverty, which may lead to other crimes and unacceptable behaviors. Finally, excessive sleep also causes lethargy and laziness. So, it is obvious that the four qualities mentioned in Couplet 605 are certainly to be avoided.

A hearty welcome to Dr. Mrs. C. Rajeswari

Dr Rajeswari Chellaiah M.A. M.Phil. Ph.D. joins our team of honorary editors. We feel much elated to have this prolific writer in our team.it will be a golden period for our Thirukkural Express to have Thirukkuralar Dr.R.Prabhakaran from U.S., Dr.Chandrika Subramanian and Dr. C Rajeswari as our adorable brain trust.

Dr. C Rajeswari is a professional translator linguist writer and editor for three decades. She did her Ph.D. in Translation studies at Madurai Kamaraj University. She has published many articles on Translation Studies in Tamil literary journals and also a book மொழிபெயர்ப்பியல் ஆய்வு a collection of articles which is available in the digital library of Tamilnadu Virtual University. She has rich experience in translating texts from different fields such as Theology, Literature, Ecology, sociology, law, and (Indian Women–Changes and Challenges, Urban Theology, Vaigai Paripatal, Assisted reproductive technologies and its Impact on Women, Eco Vision and Mission, Bachelor's Study Materials for Social Science [IGNOU], Neuro-Ophthalmology Articles) medicine.

She was an associate editor in the Institute of Asian Studies at Chennai in the encyclopedia if Tamil literature and contributed many posts for it. There she learned Japanese from Yuko-san and with her, she brought a textbook named Learn Japanese through Tamil.

She is teaching Tamil language and literature for non -Tamils who are from the USA, Europe, and Australia. She worked in the different translation and religious dictionary projects in the People Education Trust at Madurai. There she learned biblical Hebrew and Greek.

She has served as a Tamil lecturer for a few years in the colleges including The American College in Madurai.

She has been a copy editor and translator in places like Aravind Eye Hospital and taught Tamil to doctors from other states and countries. She has been a Tamil teacher for students from Madison in the Wisconsin Madurai program at Madurai. She also helped students in their projects and taught Tamil for the coordinators in South India Term Abroad at Madurai. She prepared textbooks titled Easy English and Tamil for non-Tamils which are yet to be published soon.

She is a researcher of MGR films and politics for more than three decades. She has released 16 books in Tamil about MGR so far and her aim is to publish 100 books.